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TAGS: AORC ENRG TRGY XL XM KNNP IAEA
SUBJECT: IAEA/TC: Cooperation on Food Safety in Latin America and the Caribbean

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: IAEA Technical Cooperation (TC) efforts to advance nuclear applications for food security in Latin America are exemplary within the Agency for their regional integration and partnering, but much work lies ahead. Under TC Director for Latin America Juan Antonio Casas-Zamora's leadership, members of the Regional Cooperative Agreement for the Advancement of Nuclear Science and Technology in Latin America and the Caribbean (ARCAL) and the IAEA/TC Division have strengthened their working relationship in food safety/security, human health, water resource management, and agriculture. While there have been positive steps forward, including the planning of regionally integrated projects that draw not only on IAEA expertise but also other partners (WHO, FAO), challenges remain in the region due to a lack of human capacity and environmental hazards associated with the introduction of new pests. END SUMMARY

REGIONAL SITUATION

¶2. (U) According to a 2008 ARCAL report on food safety, ten percent of the world's population lives in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region comprising 15 percent of the world's surface area. The region provides 21 percent of the world's fruit production, 7.68 percent of cereal production, 7.73 percent of root and tuber production and 11.97 percent of grain legume production. Along with high production, however, come consequences that include a progressive degradation of arable soils, the continual reduction of natural woodland, and loss of biodiversity.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

¶3. (U) As the TC Division continues to implement projects in food safety/security and agriculture; it continues to experience systemic problems in the region. One of the main issues is that scientific and technological institutions work in isolation of each other on a national and regional level. This often leads to duplication of activities and expenditures. With duplication comes a lack of continuity in research resulting in sometimes vastly different requests from national governments to fill perceived needs in a specific area. A nearly constant changeover in senior leadership of major scientific institutions also strains project implementation and results in a loss of human knowledge/training as people move in and out of jobs. While the lack of human capacity certainly strains coherent implementation, environmental threats also add stress. The continued introduction of exotic pests and diseases and the potential emergence of new pests and diseases owing to the indiscriminate use of agrochemicals is a great concern in many agriculture projects.

REGIONAL NEEDS

¶4. (U) According to a 2008 ARCAL report and Mission's recent

conversations with TC officials, there is a huge need for further human capacity building (training/education) in the application of nuclear techniques in agriculture and human health. There are also deficiencies in laboratory capacities in the region. TC officials note that if this need for training and modernization of laboratories is not addressed, it will be difficult to extend and disseminate nuclear techniques to support technological development in agriculture and human health in the region. There is also a continued need for work in curbing the presence of fruit flies and coddling moths in the region. As in Africa, fruit flies cause serious damage (up to 20-40 percent losses) to the Latin American/Caribbean region's crops. The IAEA/TC Division continues to work on establishing fruit fly-free or low-prevalence areas through the use of the sterile insect technique (SIT), which is currently the most effective and environmentally friendly option. Using SIT as a basis, Argentina has taken the first steps toward using the technique against codling moths. The FAO/IAEA Joint Division supports research related to the mass production of sterile moths, but more research is needed.

COMMENDABLE PROGRAM STILL HAS WORK TO DO

¶5. (U) COMMENT: The TC Latin America Division benefits from strong management at the Director level and is often cited as an example of an integrated TC program that addresses regional, versus national, needs in an effort to maximize return on TC fund investment. The use of SIT, a USG supported program, is very important for the region and while some countries (Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru) have embraced using the technique, others have not. Brazil and Costa Rica should be encouraged to do more to implement SIT. ARCAL Members should also capitalize on the Joint FAO/IAEA Division's support of research in compatibility studies of using SIT on the coddling moth to stem trans-border migration. END COMMENT.

DAVIES